

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** January 15, 2015

**Agenda Item:** Bighorn Sheep HD 315 Boundary Change

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Proposed

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 15 Minutes

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**Background:** Bighorn sheep hunting district 315, the Tendoy Mountains, currently includes the year-round range of the Tendoy Mountains sheep herd and a portion of the summer range of an interstate herd on the Idaho border in Idaho's Hunt Area 30. The two ranges are separated by Big Sheep Basin and the Medicine Lodge and Muddy Creek drainages – about 10 miles at their closest. The interstate herd offers very limited harvest opportunity to Montana hunters. Sheep typically move back into Idaho by the time the season opens and none of the rams taken in Montana's HD 315 over the last 15 years has come from the interstate herd. Harvest management of that herd best rests with Idaho Fish & Game. FWP wants to focus its management on the Tendoy sheep and we do not want to harvest sheep out of the interstate herd. Moreover, if the project to depopulate the Tendoy Mountains herd for later restocking comes to fruition starting in 2015 we do not want an aggressive harvest strategy in the Tendoy Mountains to affect the interstate herd. We are therefore proposing to redefine the boundary of HD 315 to include only the Tendoy Mountains. The area biologist, Craig Fager, would like this proposed new boundary to be in place permanently so as to facilitate management of the Tendoy Mountains bighorn sheep herd and not affect the interstate herd.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** Because the need to make the proposed boundary change was only recently identified there has been no discussion with the public to date. The local biologist, the R3 wildlife manager and the game management bureau chief will be in contact with local sportsmen's groups, the Montana Chapter of the Sheep Foundation, and others in the coming month. Also, in addition to public comment taken at the January 15<sup>th</sup> meeting it will go out for public comment through 5 p.m., Jan. 23, 2015. Final Commission consideration will be taken up at the February meeting.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** If the proposed boundary change is not adopted, then the possible future action of using public hunting to depopulate the Tendoy Mountains bighorn sheep herd for subsequent restocking could also result in harvesting sheep in the interstate herd, which we do not want.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends that the Commission adopt the proposed boundary change to bighorn sheep hunting district 315 as outlined above.

**Proposed Motion:** I move to adopt the proposed boundary change in bighorn sheep hunting district 315 as presented by the Department.